

A Surface Warfare Junior Officer USER GUIDE to the DETAILING PROCESS

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Introduction/The Detailing Triad

One of the best deals about being the “Head SWO JO Detailer” is the chance to visit the waterfront and meet you, our constituents. I’ve had the good fortune to be able to escape the clutches of D.C. on a few occasions to visit with many of you in the fleet and field questions about the officer distribution process. “How does the slating process work?...When should I be contacting the detailer to discuss my next set of orders?...What if I ask my command to move my PRD?...I really would like to stay in the area for my next assignment, is that possible?” are some of the many questions we are asked frequently. In many cases your detailer can give you some specific information pertaining to your career situation at present, but given all the possible variables that can influence each individual’s career (qualification status, ship’s schedules, family matters, etc.) what was once timely career advice may not still be relevant when you next speak with your detailer.

When we go out to wardrooms to provide you with the latest SWO community career presentation, we endeavor to provide you with a perspective of the officer distribution environment. This is known as the “***detailing triad***” -- our goal of balancing every officer’s ***career needs*** and ***personal needs*** with “***the needs of the Navy***.” If we are doing our job right, the sides of this “detailing triangle” (career, personal, Navy needs) are all equal. However, all of us with any time in this business have faced situations where discussions with detailers included phrases such as “what you asked for just isn’t available,” or “this is a good job which meets your career needs and is one that we just have to fill.” I can remember some of my reactions as a JO when I was on the receiving end of these conversations. Thoughts such as:

“I’m out here working 18-20 hour days, I just found out I’m scheduled to be the UNREP OOD again, I wonder if I really did park my car in a place on base that isn’t a towing zone, and the job that the detailer tells me is my next one is the best they can do for me?”

All of the detailers are intimately familiar with our community’s career progression milestones, know when an officer needs to move on, and to what kind of career enhancing assignment. The real challenge, however, is balancing the personal desires of a constituent given “***the needs of the Navy***.” And, “***the needs of the Navy***” as it pertains to our role as assignment officers is really ***the process*** we face here in PERS-412 to fill the jobs our counterparts holding down desks as placement officers tell us they need filled.

Detailer Lingo

Given this “***process***,” what are some of the things the detailer looks at when speaking with a constituent? We frequently use these acronyms and terms when discussing career moves with our customers:

- your Planned Rotation Date (or “**PRD**”) (associated with the length of your tour),
- the month the placement officer is willing to make an officer available for orders (your “**Avail date**”),
- and a billet’s “**fill date**.” This is the month the placement officer needs you (or your

relief) to detach from your current assignment to arrive at your next duty station on time. (It also takes into account any arrival delays associated with pipeline training, travel, and leave en route.)

OAIS -- the engine that drives “the process”

As PERS-412, I oversee an organization of 7 dedicated detailers charged with the responsibility of addressing the career and personal needs of about 6300 officers. (No wonder our phone lines tend to be busy most of the time....) How do we keep track of everybody? Well, the *engine* we use to power this “process” is the Bureau’s **Officer Assignment and Information System (OAIS)**. OAIS contains:

- record information on each officer (personal status, current and past assignments, qualifications, PRD/AVAIL date, etc.),
- activity manning slates (each command’s billet structure and what kind of rank/qualifications/ subspecialties are required for each billet), and
- computer functions which support the drafting and release of orders.

The OAIS database constantly changes due to many variables. And, despite our best efforts to plan ahead, we occasionally face short notice “needs of the Navy” fill requirements, many of which come under the general heading of employment schedule changes. We flex OAIS in some manner every time a deployment date changes, a ship shifts home ports, or a command (or individual) requests to adjust a PRD.

Both detailers and placement officers are dependent on the OAIS database to provide us “ground truth” when it comes to finding the jobs which best meet each officer’s career and personal needs. At the same time, we must ensure that we keep wardrooms filled with their fair share of officers.

- ◆ To support this requirement the Placement Officer relies on each command to keep him apprised of any operational factors which impact the management and turnover of officers by filing a Long Range Training, Assignment and Rotation Plan (**LORTARP**) message on a routine basis.
- ◆ Correspondingly, the detailers rely on each individual to keep us apprised of one’s personal desires by keeping an up-to-date duty preference card (**DPC**), or other form of input (E-mail, phone conversation, etc), on file. And, we rely on you to ensure that your career status and professional accomplishments are accurately documented in your record by scrubbing your microfiche on a routine basis.

Assignment protocols.

So, given the reality that we have a dynamic, ever-changing fleet manning requirement, a constantly evolving personnel base, and an information source (OAIS) designed to support the management of the officer distribution process, what are some of the protocols we follow to make the system work as efficiently as possible? They include the following:

(1) - **We adhere to our community's sea-shore rotation plan.** Most orders we cut to afloat commands include the phrase "arduous sea duty." Likewise, our billet base ashore has been reduced. Shore commands faced with meeting their mission requirements with smaller staffs are also looking to minimize personnel turbulence as well. Our senior community leaders constantly review tour lengths with an eye towards maintaining personnel readiness and to ensure that all officers move to their next career milestone on time to support upward mobility. This translates to the need to strictly adhere to the SWO sea-shore rotation plan. "The Needs of the Navy" in this regard means that if it is your time to head ashore or roll to sea, you need to move on to avoid delaying another shipmate's move – specifically, the officer scheduled to roll in behind you at your current job as well as the officer you will relieve at your next job (who needs to roll to his next career milestone).

(2) - **We do not propose an unqualified officer to a billet requiring specific professional prerequisites. Similarly, officers who have failed to screen for our community's next career milestone (or where potential screening is in doubt) are not detailed to assignments requiring that the holders of same be screened for the next career milestone.** This is a wordy statement, however, it really boils down to *common sense*. Personnel readiness means putting the right person in the right job in a timely manner. Placement Officers bear the responsibility for rejecting any proposal on the grounds that the officer proposed is not qualified. In addition, the detailee cannot afford to nominate officers for critical, career-enhancing jobs or subspecialty development programs (Naval Postgraduate School, for example) when there is lack of a clear indication that the officer is upwardly mobile. The "Go-No go" test for this usually boils down to determining whether or not the officer concerned has screened for the next career milestone; or, is considered to be a "due course officer" based upon a general comparison of that officer's record with historical selection trends seen in previous boards.

(3) - **We do not extend an officer on station to allow that officer the latitude of shopping for a billet not already posted.** To do so would ultimately cause other officers to be overtoured and would be unfair to peers not afforded the same opportunity -- in the past, or in the future.

(4) - **We make sure that a request for administrative action which results in the change of an officer's tour length is initiated by the officer concerned and is endorsed by his/her command (or the officer concerned is advised of the change proposal by his/her command).**

All PRD change requests are required to be endorsed by the involved command. Likewise, a request for a PRD adjustment from a command will not be initiated unless there is evidence to indicate that the officer is aware of and supports the change. All such changes are chopped by both detailers and placement officers prior to approval.

(5) - **We expect that officers advised by their detailers that they have been slated or proposed for an assignment will execute orders to the proposed billet.** Many billet proposals require long lead times for processing purposes and may involve a nomination process. Once we commit to supporting you in the process to get you orders to a specific billet, your backing out

downstream has the potential for overtouring the incumbent and/or generating a gap. It also stands to reason that **an officer under orders is expected to execute those orders**. This includes meeting prescribed tour lengths where applicable.

(6) - If an officer has completed his minimum service requirement (MSR) and chooses to resign his commission, adequate advance notification is needed to avoid gapping a billet. The MILPERSMAN defines this advance notification as about 9-12 months prior to PRD. Sometimes it may take longer, particularly if operational requirements dictate same and the pool of available, qualified reliefs is limited.

-- In many cases officers wishing to resign will have their requested dates endorsed if a relief is already programmed to arrive coinciding with their PRD. Similarly, officers wishing to separate on a date beyond their PRD can expect to have their resignation requests endorsed recommending separation coincident with the arrival of their relief. Short-fuzed, last minute resignation requests where an officer expects to remain on active duty well past one's PRD are specifically frowned upon because if approved they would result in "double-stuffing" a billet. Given today's fiscal realities and manning constraints, we just cannot afford two officers filling the same billet at any command.

-- Sometimes we are faced with disapproving a resignation request because an officer wants to leave the service prior to PRD or the completion of a prescribed DOD/BUPERS tour length. This frequently involves situations where the Navy has expended Permanent Change of Station (PCS) funds to cover travel and personal property move expenses incurred in conjunction with the officer's current assignment. Or, if DOD regulations require that an officer assigned to a specific billet remain in that assignment a specified tour length for continuity purposes. Again, common sense and fiscal realities come into play here. When every PCS move counts, we just can't afford to support late-breaking resignations which create unplanned billet fill requirements and generate unprogrammed moves as a result.

-- Finally, resignation requests filed because an officer does not wish to execute orders are also not acceptable for the same reasons discussed above.

Making "the process" work best for you.

Hopefully by now you have a feel for the complexity and scope of the officer distribution process and why it is important for you to understand the timing aspects associated with each of your career milestones. Be it:

- assigning 700+ newly commissioned Ensigns to their first ship (via SWOS Newport), or
- slating 150 First Tour Division Officers to their second DIVO tour on a quarterly basis, or
- filling 100 Naval Postgraduate School quotas per year, the officer distribution system is a particularly *fluid and dynamic process*!

Preparing each constituent for their next career milestone involves looking into the future usually 6 months in advance, sometimes up to 12 months. Sometimes longer, particularly the more senior you get.

Understanding the timing aspects of each career milestone affords you the ability to recognize when the detailer needs to know your latest duty preferences, what inputs are needed from you to support the assignment proposal process, and when the detailer needs to be looking for a relief for you to arrive at your current command. Making sure the detailer has the latest information pertaining to your current career and personal status is also very important. Given all this, here are some pointers to consider when looking for your next job:

(1) Know what your PRD is in the eyes of the detailer, placement officer, and your command.

When the Bureau issues you a set of orders, it assigns your PRD based upon the arrival date at your next command and the notional tour length of the job as it pertains to the SWO career track (and/or prescribed DOD tour length).

-- However, the “P” in PRD -- “**Planned**” -- is just that; an estimate of when you can expect to detach in the future. Many factors can drive an individual’s PRD to change over the course of one’s tour. Additionally, due to the fluid nature of the officer distribution process detailers frequently look at a grouping of rollers and fills plus or minus three months around a particular month. This is known in detailer/placement circles as the “**PRD Window**.” This window provides some flexibility in the process in terms of programming schools, arrival/departure times of reliefs/incumbents, and adds a little padding when considering leave and travel time.

-- If operational commitments have necessitated the adjustment of your wardroom’s LORTARP to take into account factors such as deployments, home port shifts, etc., your PRD/avail date could move as a result. If you are not aware of these changes, then the possibility exists that the detailer could be working you for a set of orders at a time which could be inconvenient for you. And, you could be making personal plans based upon information that has been overcome by events.

(2) Make sure the Detailer has the latest information pertaining to your career progression and personal status.

Your record is what sells you for your next job. Both detailer and placement officers have access to OAS and routinely scan the database for evidence of qualifications and career progression. There are some items that will be automatically entered -- things such as promotion status, dates of rank, and screening board results. However, items pertaining to your family member status are inputted to OAS from other sources (the Navy Finance Center database, for example). Other items are inputted by the detailers themselves, or by other branches in the Bureau. These include:

-- **OOD(Underway), SWO, EOOW, and TAO qualifications.** Governing instructions require commands to forward qualification letters to PERS 412. However, sometimes ships’ offices forget to send copies to us, or put the wrong address/bureau code on the envelope. Mail delays are also a fact of life in the Navy, given the nature of sea service.

--- **Our advice:** check with your detailer to see if your qual letters made it into the database a couple of months after your CO signs them out. If you are up for orders, drive the

process by faxing us copies. (We do not need nor retain any other qualification or appointment letters such as OOD In port, CMS Custodian, etc. These types of letters are not put on your microfiche and accomplishments pertaining to each are better documented in fitness reports.)

-- **Duty Preferences.** We take duty preferences in the form of Duty Preference Cards (DPCs), E-mail inputs, personal conversations, and voicemail. This information is stored in OAIS and **detailers use the latest information received to detail you to your next job.** We are not mind readers, and our ability to revisit a detail is extremely limited after an officer has been slated or proposed for orders. Detailers do not like slating or proposing an officer for a job “*in the blind*,” however, when forced to do it, we make it happen. Why? Because placement needs names posted to billets. No duty preferences on file means your personal desires become tertiary to your career needs and the needs of the Navy.

-- **Exceptional Family Member (EFM) Status.** Entered by the BUPERS EFM program desk in the form of a screen annotation which advises OAIS users of the officer’s EFM category status.

--**Fitness Reports.** Fitness reports are processed by PERS-323 and statistics similar to those found on an individual’s Officer Summary Record (OSR)/Performance Summary Record (PSR) are entered into OAIS. PERS-323 gets thousands of FITREPs to process each month and the deadlines for FITREP submissions are timed to coincide with the dates of statutory promotion boards. If you call to speak with a Detailer and ask if your FITREP is in the system, we will check OAIS.

--- If the FITREP you are concerned about is not in OAIS, we assume *worst case* -- it is not on your microfiche at that time.

--- In PERS-412 we order the microfiche page containing an officer’s FITREPS (Page 1), as well as PSRs, to staff nomination packages within BUPERS, PC Command screening packages, and to support the Department Head Slating process. These local copies are then destroyed once staffing action is complete. If we do not hold a recent local copy of your microfiche record in our office, the only way we can positively confirm that a FITREP is on microfiche is to order another copy and look for ourselves. This can take anywhere from a couple of hours, to a couple of days. Given these constraints, it is not practical for us to conduct follow-up record connectivity checks every time an officer is concerned that an item is missing from the record.

--- We also follow strict protocols pertaining to privacy act provisions and do not discuss the specific contents of FITREPS with anyone not authorized access to such information. (When asked for background on an officer we provide the kind of data an individual might provide on a resume or personal biography. Information on previous commands and billets served in, educational accomplishments, watch station/career qualifications, etc.)

-- **What about full length photos?** OAIS does not afford us the ability to view record photos and we deliver all photos mailed to us directly to PERS-323 for insertion onto microfiche.

Remember, each officer is ultimately responsible for the contents and accuracy of his/her official record, so check yours often -- at least annually, and immediately prior to a selection or screening board. Remember, it can take months to get a document originating at your command into your microfiche record at BUPERS.

(3) Be familiar with the mechanics and timing of upcoming slates.

The complexity of our career path (two DIVO/ Department Head tours, XO, CO tours, subspecialty development, war college/JPME/ joint tour requirement, etc.) has grown to the point that we now administratively slate groups of officers for each at-sea assignment. The time between an officer slating and actually arriving at the next sea tour varies from billet to billet, and pipeline training requirements and force level changes are factors driving long lead times. The table below illustrates these lead times:

<u>Billet</u>	<u>Slate Lead Times</u>	<u>DPC/personal input desired</u>
1st DIVO	5-9 months	6-10 months
2nd DIVO	5-6 months	7-8 months
1st DH	12 months	13 months
2nd DH	6 months	7 months
XO	18 months	on file
CO	2+ years	on file

(All of the above lead times are based upon current career progression requirements and are subject to change.)

The numbers of officers on each slate varies from about 60-300 officers, depending on the SWO career milestone. Each slating process involves matching an officer's professional qualifications and personal desires with a list of available billets for each slate. Detailers and Placement Officers review each slate for accuracy and completeness prior to submitting them up the chain for approval within PERS-41. More senior slates (XO and above) are provided to N86 and the Type Commanders for their review and approval.

Once slates have been staffed, reviewed and approved, they are by policy only changed should an unplanned loss of a billet, billet incumbent, or proposed officer occur. When this happens, reslates are staffed in the same manner as the original slate and require the same level of review and approval by the chain of command.

(4) Be familiar with selection board/screening board procedures and timing.

BUPERS goes to great lengths to project and program promotion zone sizes based on the overall size of the officer community as determined by Congress. Specific rules govern the scope and methodology associated with the selection board process. Your career clock starts ticking the day you accept your commission and your timing to your next rank is governed by U.S. Title 10 federal code.

The SWO career path is also timed so that you begin the screening process for your next career milestone about the same time you are completing your last one. For example, Department

Head Screening occurs shortly after an officer selects for O3. This time frame coincides with the end of one's DIVO tour experience. While all screening boards (Department Head, XO and CO) afford each candidate upwards of three looks, officers completing their tours on time and screening for their next significant at-sea tour on the first look are in a better position to plan their next assignment. So, know when you are up for promotion and screening, make sure you hit your career gates on time as much as possible, and ensure that your record is complete before you go up in front of a board. Why take the risk that someone will make a decision about your future based upon an incomplete picture?

(5) **Remember there is always a cost involved in moving you to your next duty station.**

Our fiscal year runs from 1 October to 30 September. In PERS-412 alone, we move upwards of 2500 officers a year on PCS-cost orders. Every set of orders (both PCS-cost and no-cost) must be cleared through not only the detailers and placement officers, but also the comptrollers. We have our own checkbook and every time we release a set of cost orders our checkbook balance goes down accordingly.

There are many factors which drive when and how PERS-412 spends its annual budget. However, one "sea story" which seems to surface every once in awhile is that the detailers push to allocate their PCS funds early in the fiscal year avoid a "Rob Peter to pay Paul shell game" towards the end of the fiscal year. Not really.

We phase our expenditures across the fiscal year based upon programmatic factors such as SWOS Division Officer/Department Head class convening dates, Department Head and Division Officer slates, Naval Postgraduate School curriculum start dates, etc. It makes no sense to attempt to cut someone a set of orders "in the blind" substantially ahead of one's PRD when there is a good chance that things will change downstream.

Am I suggesting that money doesn't tend to get tight towards the end of a fiscal year? No. But my experience working in this environment tells me that we will always find a way to move people to a job where the individual has been proposed by the detailer and accepted by placement. We make every effort to work around funding issues, even if it may mean a delay of some sort, rather than to break faith with a constituent.

Had Enough?

I realize that this paper has turned out to be, in retrospect, probably too long winded. I am terribly guilty of throwing around a lot of bureaucratic jargon and detailer terminology which quickly can be erased from memory when more important professional issues surface. Say for example, when the Senior Watch Officer decides to give you the midwatch the first day underway when you had the duty the previous day!

However, if I have succeeded in providing you with an appreciation of the "*process*" -- the way the triad of detailing works to address your career and personal needs while meeting the needs of the navy -- and, you are able to walk away armed with some information which can aid you in planning for the future -- then I consider my mission a success!

Above all, remember that you are a part of a long tradition of naval officers who have gone down to the sea in ships to serve their country with distinction for over 200 years. Regardless of

how long you serve and in whatever capacity, never forget that you are “a cut above” the average citizen. You have sworn to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States” all over the globe, 24 hours a day. There are things you will do and challenges you will meet that your peers on land will be amazed of when you next see them on liberty or leave. Keep the faith!